



المعهد المصري للدراسات  
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

studies

21 SEPTEMBER  
2017

# “Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis” in Sinai

Ahmed Mawlana



[WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG](http://WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG)

[f Eipss.EG](https://www.facebook.com/Eipss.EG) [t Eis\\_EG](https://twitter.com/Eis_EG)

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

## “Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis” in Sinai

Ahmed Farid Mawlana

The “Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis” (Supporters of Jerusalem) group is one of the most prominent jihadist groups that appeared in the Egyptian scene after the outbreak of the January 25 revolution, 2011, and became popular after the military coup in 2013. The jihadist group had operated under this name until November 2014, when it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (in a nine-minute audio released on Twitter) and changed its name to become “Sinai Province”.

This study addresses the roots of the group which trace back to the “Tawhid and Jihad” group that carried out several attacks against tourists in the Sinai Peninsula in 2004 and 2005 (Tawheed and Jihad, formed in 2002, has also denounced Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's former president, describing him as 'infidel', although he belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood). Although the jihadist group's members engaged in bloody clashes with the security services during the period from 2004 to 2006, however the security services succeeded in dismantling most of its cells, killed and arrested its leaders and members. However, the detention camps during the Mubarak era only represented an arena for acquaintance among jihadists, where the Sinai detainees were merged with other jihadist ideologues, which helped to reinforce relations between different jihadist groups, and enabled them to share experiences. Also, the deterioration of relations between the Salafi jihadist groups in Gaza and the Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas) following the events of the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Rafah in 2009 led to the flight of some Gazan jihadists to Sinai, and supported jihadists in Sinai. [On August 14, 2009, Salafi Jihadist Sheikh 'Abd Al-Latif Mousa denounced Hamas from the pulpit of the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Rafah and declared the formation of an Islamic Emirate in Gaza. Following prayers, Hamas security forces laid



siege to the mosque and to surrounding buildings in which the rebels had taken up positions. The move reportedly left 22 people dead, including Mousa and a high-level Hamas military commander.]

Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis group had attempted to carry out its early operations against the Israeli army in 2010, but it did not succeed due to the unfavourable security situation at the time. However, the January 25 revolution represented a major qualitative shift for the group, when hundreds of jihadists were released from prisons. The group first appeared in public early September, 2011, when it claimed responsibility for an attack ( August 18, 2011) against Israeli targets near the city of "Eilat".

The study also addresses the Sharia approach, the intellectual framework, and the political vision of the Salafi Jihadist group, which confirmed that it did not engage in a conflict with the al-Sisi regime or target army and police elements in response to the overthrowing of Mohammed Morsi. However, it claimed, according to a statement by the group, that its move was “in defense of the Muslims that were killed by the tyrant and his soldiers in the Republican Guard club, Rabaa, and Nahda; the massacres committed in silence against the Sinai people; and in defense of the besieged people of Gaza”.

The study then discusses the general strategy of the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which was based on targeting Israel and its interests and preparing to confront the Egyptian regime. Therefore, in the aftermath of the military coup in 2013, the group engaged in direct confrontation with the police and army forces inside and outside Sinai. The study also addresses the group’s organizational structure, location, and the substantive committees that it has formed. The study also tackles the group's strategy of armament and acquisition of military expertise, its efforts to infiltrate into sovereign institutions; the sites where explosives were manufactured and the booby-trapped

vehicles were prepared; as well as the funding sources. The study also deals with the strategy of the group's operations in Sinai. After the military coup, the group adopted a policy of maintaining a gradual escalation of attacks to weaken the army and police forces and demoralize them, and at the same time targeting the economic interests of the regime: such as attacking gas pipelines that supply the army's cement factories with fuel, and the pipelines extended to Jordan; as well as targeting foreign tourists.

The study also addresses in detail the strategy of the group's attacks outside Sinai, which relied on targeting centers of security command and control, such as security directorates and headquarters of military intelligence, in addition to assassinating senior security officials, and creating a state of security confusion and chaos through targeting police checkpoints systematically; within a scheme to weaken the security grip, and turn the state of popular anger aroused by the massacres committed by the regime during the dispersal of Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins to a "jihadist" state that could gradually develop, enabling them to control police headquarters and military camps, and finally establish an Islamist regime.

The study also discusses in detail the media activity of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, whether written or visual, as well as analyzing the content of its media discourse before and after the military coup. The paper also deals with the difference between the group and other jihadist organizations such as Al-Furqan Brigades, Ansar al-Sharia in Egypt, and Ajnad Misr. The study then addresses the security crackdown on the group by the Egyptian regime, both inside and outside Sina, as well as the assassination of some of the group cadres by Israel.

The study also analyzes the timeline of the group's operations outside Sinai, starting from the military coup in 2013 until pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in 2014. The paper also discusses the extent of the group's rapprochement with al-Qaeda before abandoning it in favor of pledging allegiance to Daesh, and the differences that

erupted among the group cadres against the backdrop of allegiance to the Islamic State, resulting in the dissension of the group leader outside Sinai, Hisham Ashmawi, along with a number of his followers and establishing “Al-Murabitun” organization in 2015.

The study also introduces a demographic analysis of the data of some 200 persons accused of joining the group, including: the average age, the geographical distribution, and the nature of their career. This analysis has revealed that the average age of the group's members is 28 years, and that there is a majority of students and small businessmen among the organization ranks compared to the number of employees.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study presents an analysis of the group's experience, stressing that the group is an extension of the “Tawhid and Jihad” group in terms of members – as the group’s Sinai leaders were former members of the Tawhid and Jihad group. In terms of strategy, the group focuses on targeting Israeli interests and countering security crackdown. Also, the jihadist group benefited from the weaknesses that led to dismantling the "Tawhid and Jihad" group, by avoiding early engagement in conflicts with security services. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis has also sought to build (organizational) arms in some of Egypt’s governorates to prevent the security forces’ pressures on Sinai in the event of a clash between the two parties. . It has also benefited from the regional situation following the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions which led to the release of Jihadists from the prisons. They were also able to have access to the Gaddafi arms stores in Libya, and controlled vast areas in Syria, Iraq and Libya, which enabled them to form support and smuggling networks, in exploitation of the state of security chaos on the border in smuggling weapons and individuals.

The group adopted a long-term strategy for preparation and confrontation. Also, its tactical performance was highly professional, as it concentrated on targeting the regime's centers of gravity. The group was distinguished in its strong security system; the security services were unable to penetrate the ranks of the group or dismantle their cells before operations were carried out. However, the group succeeded in penetrating the security services and recruiting some army and police officers.

In fact, the group's allegiance to the Islamic State led to internal splits, isolated the group within the limits of Daesh, and linked it to the fate of the parent organization. Also, pledging allegiance to the IS led to changing the group's military approach from staging guerrilla warfare to seeking to control lands, pushing itself into disputes with tribes.

*There were other obstacles that obstructed the group's plans, such as:*

- The Muslim Brotherhood's refusal to resort to violence after the military coup contributed to forming a state of rejection of violence among the regime opponents who were protesting against the military coup.
- The cohesion of Egyptian society, the government's strong control over the central provinces, and the geographical nature of the valley limited the possibilities of maneuvering and establishment of training camps.
- The extensive experience of the Egyptian security services contributed to dismantling most of the group cells as soon as some of the group members had been arrested.